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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [IZ](#) [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [SY](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH MFA VIEWS ON TIGRIS-EUPHRATES COOPERATION

REF: A. BAGHDAD 360

[B](#). STATE 199151

[C](#). ANKARA 1373

Classified By: Econ Counselor Thomas Goldberger for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: During the August visit to Ankara of IIG President al-Yawar, Iraqi Water Minister Rashid proposed beginning talks on Tigris-Euphrates cooperation. MFA Transboundary Water Chief Mithat Rende said that while Rashid's presentation was "positive," it did not lead to any agreement on moving forward. Rende explained that there remains a lack of confidence among the three riparian countries. He listed several familiar Turkish concerns about moving forward, and he noted Turkey's position that the tripartite Joint Technical Committee was dead. However, his optimistic remarks about Syria and his ideas about ways the U.S. could facilitate cooperation might indicate a new willingness to explore cooperation. End Summary.

Proposal of Iraqi Water Minister Rashid

[1](#)2. (C) Regional Environment Officer (REO) and visiting USGS hydrologist Janet Hren met October 1 with MFA Transboundary Water Policy Head Mithat Rende to discuss the latest developments in Turkey's water policies. Rende reported that Iraqi Water Minister Rashid had accompanied Iraqi President al-Yawar on his August 2004 visit to Ankara. In a meeting with Foreign Minister Gul, Rashid expressed his desire for cooperation with Turkey on the Tigris and Euphrates. Rende said that Rashid's presentation was positive, but did not offer new ideas on how to move the process forward.

[1](#)3. (C) Rende emphasized that Turkey considers the shared waters of the Tigris and Euphrates as a source for building cooperation with Syria and Iraq. However, when we pressed on what was lacking, Rende said that there remains a fundamental lack of confidence among the countries and Turkey remains wary of anti-Turkish feelings in Syria and Iraq that have poisoned past discussions on the Tigris-Euphrates. To move forward, Rende said, leaders in Syria and Iraq must express a firm political will to engage in meaningful cooperation; put a stop to the repeated resolutions, supported by Iraq and Syria in the Arab League, in which Turkey is portrayed as using water as a weapon against its Arab neighbors; conduct joint projects; and exchange information. Rende claimed that previous efforts to exchange data have been one-sided. He said that Iraq has asked for -- and received -- hydrological information, but has not offered to provide information in return. As evidence of Iraq's reluctance, Rende cited an unanswered request Turkey made three years ago for information on Iraq's plans to divert water into the Dokan reservoir. Later Rende added that no discussion can take place until the three countries agree with Turkey's position that the Tigris and Euphrates must be dealt with as a single water basin. Rende claimed that Syria now agrees with this position. He said that an earlier Iraqi proposal to restart the trilateral commission would go nowhere -- "it's dead; new mechanisms are needed to build cooperation." In January, Iraqi officials had proposed reviving the committee.

Syria

[1](#)4. (SBU) Rende said that relations with Syria continue to improve, and recently that has included progress on water issues. In addition to Syria's support for the "single basin" concept, Rende said Syria acknowledged that Turkey's dams provide important benefits for Syria. He also reported that Syrian officials asked "Ankara's blessing" for a project to pump as much as 1.5 bcm per year of water from the Tigris river for irrigation.

U.S. Role as Facilitator

[1](#)5. (SBU) Hren briefed Rende on USGS experience on similar issues, included Israel-Jordan Water cooperation, and asked in what ways the U.S. could be helpful. Rende reiterated that third party intervention would be a mistake, "but Turkey

welcomes facilitating efforts." He reminded REO that MFA U/S Ziyal in June 2003 told officials in Washington that Turkey wanted to be part of the solution and offered to "contribute to the reconstruction works of water and hydropower infrastructures of Iraq." Rende said that the U.S. could help in a number of ways, including training Iraqi officials and technicians on modern principles for water basin management. Rende said Iraqi officials needed more background on the Helsinki Rules, which describe the internationally-accepted principle of equitable and reasonable use of shared water resources. He added that all three countries would benefit from technical support to help them collect and share common water data. Noting that all three countries need to do a better job of managing water resources for agriculture, he suggested projects on efficient use of water in agriculture would be welcome.

Water for Israel, Libya and Cyprus

16. (U) Rende said that Turkey remains committed to the Manavgat water project to transport fresh water via tankers to Israel, but Israel seems reluctant to move forward. Rende added that Libyan officials had expressed interest in a similar scheme to buy fresh water from Turkey. Turkey continues to explore ways to deliver fresh water to Cyprus: an Israeli company will begin ferrying water to Cyprus using large water bladders, and Turkey hopes to build a fresh water pipeline to Cyprus to provide fresh water to both sides of the island. The total cost of the pipeline would be about USD 1 billion. he said.

Comment

17. (SBU) Turkey's MFA securely controls Turkey's policy on the sensitive Tigris-Euphrates issue -- and Rende is the point man. In previous conversations, Rende has portrayed Turkey as eager to cooperate but suspicious of Iraq and Syria. What was new were his positive comments about Syria and his thoughts on ways the U.S. could facilitate cooperation with Iraq. For example, his idea on water efficient agriculture could build confidence that each of the countries is looking to carefully use the shared water. One of Turkey's complaints about Iraq (and to a lesser extent Syria) is that it has a history of wasting water for overly ambitious and poorly managed agricultural schemes. Turkish GAP officials have told REO that this is a problem as well for the GAP programs designed to pump Euphrates water to irrigate the plains of upper Mesopotamia in Turkey. CYMMIT, the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center located in Ankara, is developing a series of agricultural innovations which it describes as "water conservation agriculture" that reduce water usage, soil erosion and salinization. REO will fax a brief description of the projects to OES/PCI and NEA/REA.

18. (U) Baghdad Minimize Considered.
EDELMAN